

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0040
INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSYPRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 GABORONE 1290

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS UK, US, SF, BC
SUBJECT: BOTSWANA REQUEST FOR SECURITY ASSISTANCE

REF: A) STATE 127960, B) STATE 114899, C) GABORONE 929

1. SUMMARY: THE GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA (GOB) HAS TURNED TO THE U.S. FOR ASSISTANCE IN MEETING THE PRINCIPAL REQUIREMENTS OF ITS PRESENT 1,050-MAN DEFENSE FORCE (BDF), WHICH WAS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY BOTSWANA'S PARLIAMENT AND CABINET, AND TO WHICH PRESIDENT SERETSE KHAMA IS THOROUGHLY COMMITTED. ONE BACKGROUND FACT CANNOT BE OVEREMPHASIZED, NAMELY THAT UNTIL THE BDF WAS CREATED IN MARCH, BOTSWANA HAD MOBILE POLICE UNITS BUT NO MILITARY, NO DEFENSE BUDGET, NO MILITARY TRADITION, AND NO INTEREST IN STARTING ONE. IT RELIED ON ITS PEACEFUL AND PASSIVE NATURE, "THAT OUR WEAKNESS IS OUR STRENGTH", IN PRESIDENT KHAMA'S WORDS, FOR ITS PROTECTION (GABORONE 836, PARA 3). A SERIES OF
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EVENTS IN LATE 1976 AND EARLY 1977 CHANGED THESE ATTITUDES, PRINCIPALLY THE PERIODIC POLICE RAIDS AND INCURSIONS BY RHODESIAN ARMY UNITS ALONG THE COMMON 500-MILE BOTSWANA-RHODESIAN BORDER AS WELL AS THE PERSISTENT AND SOMETIMES VIOLENT RIVALRIES AMONG REFUGEE ZIMBABWEAN NATIONALIST FACTIONS IN BOTSWANA. ALTHOUGH UNANIMOUSLY LAMENTING THE NEED TO DIVERT FUNDS FROM DEVELOPMENT, THE

GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE ALIKE INSISTED THAT A DEFENSE FORCE BE ESTABLISHED, A DECISION THAT HAS SINCE BEEN EQUALLY UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTED. A UN MISSION HEADED BY ASYG FARAH AND COMPOSED OF A DOZEN EXPERTS (INCLUDING CANADIAN AND U.S. NATIONALS) STUDIED BOTSWANA'S DEFENSE PLANS AND NEEDS AND RECOMMENDED INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO HELP DEFRAY THE COST OF DIVERTING DEVELOPMENT FUNDS TO DEFENSE. TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL DEFENSE EQUIPMENT FOR BDF, BOTSWANA HAS TURNED TO THE U.S.--AT THE VERY MOMENT THAT THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION'S SHARPLY RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD ARMS TRANSFERS, INCLUDING THE VIRTUAL EXCLUSION OF NEW PROGRAMS, WAS BEING ANNOUNCED. FURTHERMORE, ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE NEW LIMITS ON ARMS TRANSFERS REFLECT THE MOOD OF THE CONGRESS, THE COUNTRY, AND MOST U.S. AMBASSADORS TO AFRICA, JUDGING BY REACTIONS AT THE ABIDJAN COM CONFERENCE. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THEREFORE, WE HAVE BEEN ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS REFLECTING THE GENERAL SKEPTICISM ABOUT GOB'S SECURITY ASSISTANCE REQUESTS (REFS A AND B). IN VIEW OF THE GENERALLY NEGATIVE SENTIMENT, THE BROADER QUESTION ARISES: WHY PERSIST IN THE REQUEST? THE ANSWER IS TO BE FOUND IN THIS AND SUCCEEDING TELEGRAMS IN WHICH WE OUTLINE THE PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS ASKED AND PROVIDE OUR ANSWERS AND ANALYSES. FOLLOWING ARE KEY Q'S AND A'S ON "POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS". SUBSEQUENT MESSAGES ADDRESS (A) THIRD COUNTRY INVOLVEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE UK AND COMMUNIST COUNTRIES; AND (B) ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO THE CREATION OF THE BDF.

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2. ACTION REQUESTED: THAT THE DEPARTMENT REVIEW BOTSWANA'S REQUEST FOR SECURITY ASSISTANCE IN THE LIGHT OF (A) RECENT U.S. POLICY INITIATIVES AND OBJECTIVES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA;

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0041

INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 GABORONE 1290

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(B) THE IMPETUS THAT COULD BE GIVEN THOSE POLICIES AT RELATIVELY LITTLE COST; (C) BOTSWANA'S RECORD AS ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING FRIENDLY, DEMOCRATIC, NON-RACIAL REGIMES, ONE THAT RESPECTS HUMAN RIGHTS AND THAT ALMOST ALONE OF THE FRONTLINE STATES STILL BELIEVES IN, AND IS WORKING FOR, PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN PROBLEMS; AND (D) THE CONSEQUENCES TO U.S. POLICY OF NOT RESPONDING FAVORABLY. WE JOIN UN AND GOB IN DEPLORING THE FACT AND, MORE IMPORTANT, THE CAUSES UNDERLYING BOTSWANA'S NEED TO ARM AND ITS REQUEST FOR SECURITY ASSISTANCE AND CREATION OF ITS DEFENSE FORCE. WE WOULD ADD ONLY THAT A LESS DESIRABLE OPTION TO MEETING THE REQUEST WOULD BE TO IGNORE OR DISMISS IT AND THEREBY APPEAR TO REMAIN INDIFFERENT TO BOTSWANA'S DEEPLY FELT NEED (PSYCHOLOGICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY) FOR ASSISTANCE IN ITS EFFORTS TO DEFEND ITS NEUTRALITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. RECOMMENDATION: THAT WE SEEK A PRESIDENTIAL DETERMINATION TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE SALE OF DEFENSE ARTICLES AND SERVICES TO CONFIDENTIAL

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BOTSWANA ON FMS CREDIT TERMS. END SUMMARY.

3. POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. Q: SHOULD WE ASK PRESIDENT CARTER TO MAKE A DETERMINATION UNDER SECTION 3(A) (1) OF THE ARMS EXPORT CONTROL ACT, THAT THE SALE OF DEFENSE ARTICLES AND SERVICES TO BOTSWANA "WILL STRENGTHEN THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES AND PROMOTE WORLD PEACE?

A: BOTSWANA'S GEOGRAPHY AND ITS ROLE AS A FRONTLINE STATE BORDERING ON ALL THREE PROBLEM AREAS (RHODESIA, NAMIBIA AND SOUTH AFRICA) WHERE U.S. IS NOW COMMITTED TO BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE, CLEARLY GIVE SUCH ASSISTANCE A U.S.-SECURITY DIMENSION. WE BELIEVE PEACE IN THE AREA WILL BE PROMOTED BY STRENGTHENING THE HAND OF PRESIDENT KHAMA, GIVEN HIS BELIEF IN NEGOTIATED SOLUTIONS,

HIS RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRATIC OUTLOOK AND NON-RACISM. ALTHOUGH HIMSELF RELUCTANT AT THE OUTSET, PRESIDENT KHAMA NOW STRONGLY PROMOTES THE REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE, WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY MADE MARCH 31 (GABORONE 739). ON MAY 25, PHIL STEENKAMP GAVE US A COMPREHENSIVE REQUEST PREPARED BY IAN KHAMA. (BEFORE FORWARDING TO DEPARTMENT FOR COSTING OUT WE ARE TAKING STEPS TO REDUCE IT TO ESSENTIALS AND DIVIDE IT IN ANNUAL INCREMENTS.) FMS CREDITS FOR BOTSWANA WOULD (A) HELP GOB MEET ITS WELL-ESTABLISHED NEED TO DIVERT RESOURCES FROM DEVELOPMENT TO DEFENSE; (B) KEEP THE GOB ORIENTED TO WESTERN SOURCES OF MILITARY SUPPLY AND TRAINING; (C) ENHANCE, BY RESPONDING QUICKLY, OUR INFLUENCE WITH THE GOB AND ITS PRAGMATIC ALLIES; (D) REMEDY BOTSWANA'S MILITARY INADEQUACY AND THEREBY DEMONSTRATE OUR SUPPORT FOR ITS STABLE, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT.

4. Q: WHAT WILL BE THE LONG-TERM POLITICAL IMPACT ON OUR RELATIONS WITH BOTSWANA IF WE DO NOT PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE?

A: IT WOULD BE AN INSTANCE OF THE WEST FAILING TO
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MEET BOTSWANA'S DEEPLY FELT AND URGENT NEED. (OTHER INSTANCES: OUR ABSTENTION JANUARY 14 ON BOTSWANA'S RESOLUTION IN THE UN, OUR FAILURE TO COMMIT OURSELVES TO PAVING THE BOT-ZAM ROAD, APPARENT PROCRASTINATION IN LICENSING THE GOB'S EARLIER ARMS PURCHASE.) IN THE MINDS OF MANY BATSWANA, FAILURE TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS IDENTIFYING U.S. WITH UNDERLYING SYMPATHY FOR WHITE MINORITY REGIMES. IT WOULD MAKE MORE DIFFICULT GOB'S STAND AGAINST RADICAL VIEWS AND POSITIONS IN FRONTLINE AND OTHER BLACK AFRICAN STATES. WITHOUT MILITARY ASSISTANCE, BOTSWANA WOULD BE EVEN MORE VULNERABLE TO EXTERNAL PRESSURE AND UNABLE TO POLICE REFUGEES AND GUERRILLAS WITHIN HER OWN BORDERS.

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AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 3 GABORONE 1290

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

5. Q: IS IT IN THE U.S. INTEREST TO ENTER INTO A MILITARY
SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER AFRICAN COUNTRY?

A: THIS IS PARTLY ANSWERED ABOVE. U.S. INTERESTS
IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD ARE PRIMARILY POLITICAL, AND ONLY
SECONDARILY DEVOTED TO GUARANTEEING ACCESS TO RESOURCES
(I.E., MINERALS). BUT BOTSWANA IS NOT JUST ANOTHER
"AFRICAN COUNTRY". IT IS ONE OF PERHAPS TWO DEMOCRATIC
REGIMES ON THE CONTINENT; ALTHOUGH A YOUNG NATION, IN
TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES,
IT HAS AN EXCELLENT RECORD AND PROSPECTS. AS AN EXAMPLE
OF A SUCCESSFUL BLACK-MAJORITY GOVERNMENT. BOTSWANA
HAS A HIGH INTRINSIC VALUE TO THE CAUSE OF PEACE AND HENCE
TO U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. IT BEARS REPEATING
THAT THIS UNIQUE REGIME IS AN ACTIVE PROPONENT OF OUR
POLICY GOALS, E.G., PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS TO THE AREA'S
PROBLEMS. ALTHOUGH PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE MAY KEEP THE GOB INTERESTED IN RELATIVELY GOOD
RELATIONS WITH US, SHOULD THE GOB ACCEPT (OR BELIEVE ITSELF
OBLIGED TO TAKE) SOVIET (OR MORE CHINESE) MILITARY AID, OUR
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INFLUENCE, PRESTIGE AND CREDIBILITY WOULD BE ERODED.

6. Q: CAN THE BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE BE A CREDIBLE
DETERRENT?

A: THE GOB IS UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT THE PRESENT
OR PROPOSED BDF COULD DEFEND THE COUNTRY AGAINST THREATS
TO ITS SOVEREIGNTY FROM RHODESIAN FORCES OR
CONFLICTING ZIMBABWEAN NATIONALIST FACTIONS OVER THE LONG
COMMON BORDER. IT WILL CERTAINLY BE ONE OF THE WORLD'S
SMALLEST DEFENSE ORGANIZATIONS. HOWEVER, THE GOB
BELIEVES THAT THE ALTERNATIVE OF DOING NOTHING IS WHOLLY
UNREALISTIC AND UNACCEPTABLE. THE GOB IS CONVINCED (AND
WE CONCUR) THAT EVEN A SMALL FORCE WILL HAVE AT LEAST A

PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE IN DISCOURAGING OPERATIONS AGAINST BOTSWANA. IT WOULD CERTAINLY GIVE THE GOB AN IMPORTANT CAPABILITY IT DOES NOT NOW HAVE, I.E., TO GUARD REFUGEE CAMPS, RAILWAY BRIDGES, POPULATION CENTERS, POLICE AND MILITARY CAMPS, AND ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE TO LIST ONLY THE MOST VULNERABLE AND IMPORTANT TARGETS.

7. Q: ARE BOTSWANA'S RELATIONS STRAINED WITH THE ZIMBABWE NATIONALIST GROUPS?

A: INTER-FACTIONAL FIGHTING AMONG ZIMBABWEANS IS A CENTRAL CONCERN OF THE BDF. SOME KEY GOB OFFICIALS PRIVATELY SAY IT IS THE GREATEST LONG-TERM THREAT. THE BDF WILL GIVE THE GOB THE CAPABILITY NOW TO POLICE ITS OWN TERRITORY AGAINST ZIMBABWE AND OTHER GUERRILLA BANDS AND TO REMOVE ANY REASON FOR WHITE MINORITY REGIMES TO VIOLATE BOTSWANA'S NEUTRALITY. GOB OFFICIALS MAKE CLEAR, AS NOTED, THAT THEY SEE THE MAIN THREAT COMING NOT FROM THE PRESENT GOVERNMENTS IN RHODESIA AND SOUTH AFRICA, BUT FROM THEIR EVENTUAL SUCCESSORS. IT IS NO SECRET THAT ITS BLACK NEIGHBORS CONSIDER THE GOB INSUFFICIENTLY MILITANT IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE. IN EXPLAINING THE GOB'S NEW REQUEST FOR RIFLES, STEENKAMP REMARKED THAT THE GOB ALSO INTENDED EVENTUALLY TO FORM "HOME GUARD" UNITS ALONG THE

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RHODESIAN BORDER. "AFTER ALL, NKOMO HAS 15,000 TROOPS", HE SAID, ADDING THAT THE GOB MUST BE PREPARED TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST THE SPILLOVER OF WHAT MAY WELL BECOME AN ALL-OUT CIVIL WAR IN ZIMBABWE.

8. Q: IS PRESIDENT KHAMA TRYING TO STRIKE A BALANCE OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE POLICE?

A: PROBABLY. ALTHOUGH DAVID MOPHUTING EXPLAINED THAT THE POLICE WOULD "KEEP AN EYE ON THE BDF IN THE EVENT ANY ARMY OFFICERS GET A LITTLE NASTY" (BABORONE 0972), THERE IS LITTLE IN THE WAY OF A MILITARY TRADITION OR PROFESSION HERE. WE WOULD RATE THE LIKELIHOOD OF A MILITARY COUP IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AS VIRTUALLY NIL.

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